

Introduction to Cultural Studies

Lecture 3:

Changing Media Changing Cultures

- 1) Basic Assumptions and Definitions
- 2) The Cultural Implications of Changing Media Environments: Some Examples
- 3) Coming to Terms
- 4) Coda

1) Basic Assumptions and Definitions

(for an overview cf. Assmann 2012)

[I]t is the medium that shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action. The content or uses of such media are as diverse as they are ineffectual in shaping the form of human association. In fact, it is only too typical that the 'content' of any medium blinds us to the character of the medium.

(McLuhan 1994 [1964], 9)

► 'The Medium Is the Message' / 'The Medium Is the Massage'

All media work us over completely. They are so pervasive in their personal, political, economic, aesthetic, psychological, moral, ethical, and social consequences that they leave no part of us untouched, unaffected, unaltered.

(McLuhan/Fiore 1967, 26)

We live in a thoroughly 'mediatized' world, a social and cultural environment which is permeated by the media, and, more specifically, electronic media.

(Voigts-Virchow 2005, 5)

Whatever we know about our society, or indeed about the world in which we live, we know through the mass media ... *how* is it possible to accept information about the world and about society as information about reality when one knows *how* it is produced?

(Luhmann 2000 [1996], 1/122)

Some Definitions:

(lat. *medius*: middle, intermediate, average, middling)



medium

OED: 'something that is intermediate between two degrees, amounts, qualities, or classes; a middle state'

biology/chemistry: enveloping substance

sociology: environment, social setting

[...]

'what transforms experience into knowledge'

'the signs which give *meaning* to the events of everyday life'

(Inglis 1990, 3)

Some Terminological Distinctions:

- input/output media (typewriter, keyboard, camera, microphone, scanner)
- reproduction and dissemination media (printing, photography, film)
- storage media (book, photography, disk, hard disk, film)
- transmission media (mail, telegraphy, telephone, radio, TV, cable, satellite)
- 'push media' offer programmes (TV, newspapers)
- 'pull media' depend on user activity (www)
- mass media 'one to many'
(vs. 'one to one'
'many to many')
- unidirectional vs. multidirectional
- static vs. dynamic

Levels of Inquiry:

- technological approach:
focus on 'channels', interpreting media contents (genres, narratives, ideas, roles)
- humanities approach:
focus on 'languages', understanding media grammar and intermediality (sound and vision, media design, etc.)
- social and cultural studies approach:
focus on 'environments', mapping the media context (media usage, interactivity, dissemination)

Layers of Mediality (Luhmann):

- (1) meaning
- (2) language
- (3) storage and distribution: writing, print, electronic media
- (4) symbolically generalized media of communication ('success media')

(cf. Reinfandt 2012)

Phases of Media History:

- | | | |
|----------|---------------|--|
| A | - 1500 | 'human' media (small groups)
theatre, oral trad., manuscripts |
| B | - 1900 | print media (individual ► mass media)
letters, pamphlets, books, newspapers etc.
photography, phonography |
| C | - 2000 | electronic media (mass media)
telegraph/telephone, film, radio, television, audio/video |
| D | ? | substitution media
computer (digitalization, multimedia), internet |

(cf. Faulstich 2004)

Principles of Media History:

- 1) accumulation of media > changes of function
 - 2) increasing dynamics (Phase A: 30000 – 40000 years,
Phase B: 400 years,
Phase C: 100 years,
Phase D: ?)
 - 3) mediation between human beings and reality becomes ever more inclusive and complete
- media convergence, intermediality, media systems comprising language, technology, institutions and products/offerings
 - mediality (the specific cultural conditions of various media at a given historical stage)

1) The Cultural Implications of Changing Media Environments: Some Examples

a) [(Cultural) History]

A History of the Real (and the Physical!) in Terms of Changing 'Ontological Holds' on the Real Depending on New Forms of Media Technology

(cf. Siskin 2007):

Before 1800: a metaphysical real + a virtual physical



After 1800: a physical real + a virtual representation



Tomorrow? a virtual real? + a metaphysics of text?

► “the older *form* of reality becomes the *content* of the new one” (125f.)

(cf. Wordsworth's metaphysical charging of physical nature or today's physical charging of virtual reality)

A New Mode of Writing Cultural History:

'Enlightenment' and 'Romanticism' as 'events in the history of mediation'

(cf. Siskin/Warner 2010)

establishing two competing foundational discursive formations of modernity.

Clifford Siskin, William Warner, eds., *This Is Enlightenment*. Chicago/London: U of Chicago P, 2010.

Peter Otto, *Multiplying Worlds: Romanticism, Modernity, and the Emergence of Virtual Reality*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011.

Palgrave Studies in the Enlightenment, Romanticism and Cultures of Print.

Ed. Anne K. Mellor and Clifford Siskin (30 vols since 2004).

b) [Ireland]

[map from Lucien Febvre & Henri-Jean Martin, *L'Apparition du livre* (1958)]

There is a map, originally prepared for Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin's *L'Apparition du livre* in 1958, but reprinted frequently since, which shows the spread of printing in Europe before 1500. Little clusters of dots, densely packed around centres such as Venice and Strasbourg, more sparsely scattered elsewhere, indicate the first appearance of printed books in the half century after Gutenberg's introduction to Europe of movable type in the 1450s. It is one of those clear, useful maps that unfolds for its reader an entire history at a glance, tracing the footprints of the new technology along trade routes and over the Alps, as it defines a new geography of knowledge.

For the Irish reader, however, this map tells a different story – although perhaps not the one the authors intended. The map's legend, explaining the meaning of the variously shaped dots, is placed squarely in the upper left-hand corner, completely blotting out the entire island of Ireland. In the early history of the printed word, Ireland simply did not exist.

If we move forward to the year 2004 [... we find that for] the third year in a row, towering over the rest of the world, as 'the most globalized country in the world' [in terms of economic integration, personal contact, technological connectivity and political engagement], was Ireland, ahead of Singapore and Switzerland in second and third place, well clear both of the United States in seventh place and the United Kingdom in twelfth. [...]

In a sense, this book is about the territory between these two points.

(Morash 2012, 1)

Ireland has been imagined in many ways: as a territory, as a state, as an economy and as a culture variously defined by language, literature or historical narrative. However, it is also possible to imagine Ireland in another way: as the confluence of information flows, as the nodal point around which books, newspapers, signals, sounds and images circulate.

To imagine Ireland in this way is to conjure up something far less stable than an island bounded by the sea, a set of political boundaries, or a culture with some kind of fixed core, however tenuously or strategically defined. [...]

If the idea of Ireland as circulating media challenges the cultural notion of a 'real' Ireland, outside of (or prior to) mediation, so too does it exceed the territorial or political idea of Ireland, spilling messily over borders. [...]

(Morash 2012, 226)

It may well be that we have only now reached the point at which we can begin to think about Ireland in terms of this kind of media history, and begin to trace the ways in which this history maps on to other histories, political, cultural or economic. [...] It would now appear that one effect of the advent of the digital media, which have taken all earlier forms of media as their content more rapidly and more voraciously than any previous technology, is to allow us to see those earlier media more clearly. Recordings, books, newspapers, pamphlets, films and television programmes now make up an electronic archive that is growing by the day.

As all previous media thus become digital content, we can begin to think about Ireland in a new way, as a nodal point of successive and overlapping forms of media, and we can begin to trace the outlines of this archival grid of overlapping media. As we do so, we need to remember that this grid, this network, does not simply exist at a given moment; it has a history, and it changes, moment by moment, in scope and coverage, throughout that history. Finally, as this historical grid comes into focus, we can also begin to see the places left empty by those things that it cannot contain, the unmediated; at that point, we can at least gesture towards that which is lost to history, but which we may still wish to claim for an imagined Ireland.

(Morash 2012, 230)

c) [India]

Bhagwati Prasad & Amitabh Kumar, *Tinker. Solder. Tap: A Graphic Novel*.
Delhi: The Sarai Programme, 2009.

Freely available from:

<http://www.sarai.net/publications/occasional/tinker-solder-tap>

as part of the project

“Social and Material Life of Media Piracy” of Sarai and Alternative Law Forum
(Bangalore)

supported by

International Development Research Centre, Canada.

(cf. Wiemann 2011)

Robin Jeffrey & Assa Doron, *Cell Phone Nation: How Mobile Phones Have Revolutionized Business, Politics and Ordinary Life in India*. Gurgaon: Hachette India, 2013.

3) Coming to Terms

Dimensions of Mediality (cf. S.J. Schmidt/G. Zurstiege 2000):

A) Semiotic Materials:

The basic components of all media are semiotic materials fit for communicative use. Those semiotic materials may be speech, gestures, sounds, images as well as fashion or even the human body when it is included in rituals, dance or theatre.

B) Media Technologies:

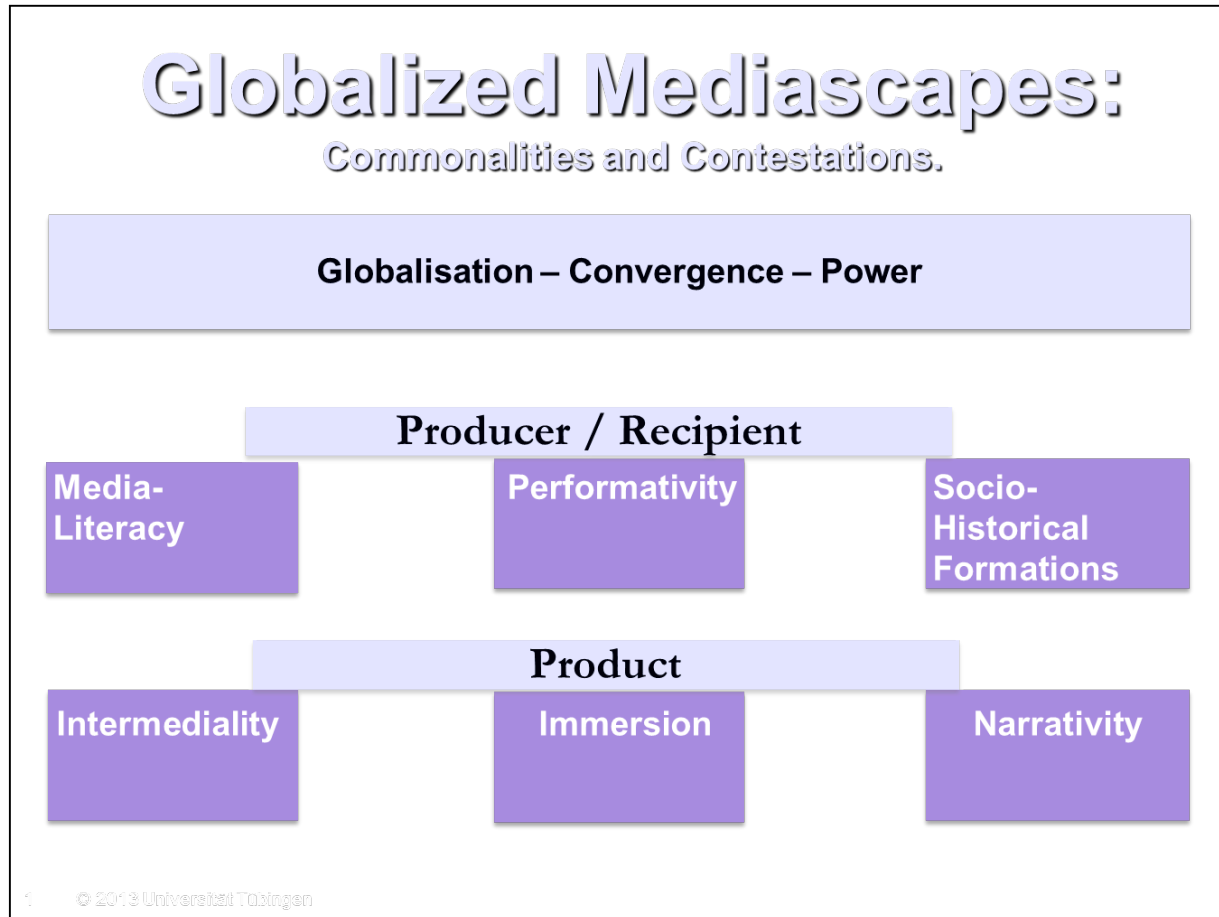
Technology is necessary to produce, transmit, and receive semiotic materials in the form of media products. Any specific media technology is put to use within a socio-political situation, while it also embodies a specific bias of constructing and perceiving reality in one way or another.

C) Social Systemic Organizations:

The planning, production, distribution, and subsequent processing of media products is performed by actors who act on their own behalf or on behalf of others. Those actors are linked to specific social systemic contexts, which can be distinguished on three levels: Macro (society), Meso (functional systems) and Micro (systems of organization and interaction).

D) Media Products:

Media products (genres, formats) such as books, newspapers, TV- shows, advertising, computer-games, film, or dance and theater performances emerge from the interaction of semiotic materials, media technologies and social systemic organizations and have to be analyzed with reference to all three dimensions.



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4) Coda

Gail Jones, "Modernity" (1991)

She is absolutely terror-stricken. Human beings are visually torn to pieces, the heads thrown one way, the bodies another. Faces loom large or contract to tiny circles. There are severed heads, multiple dismemberments, and horrible discontinuities. The girl flees from the cinema, and as an incidental service to the history of representation writes a letter to her father describing in detail the shocking phenomenon she has witnessed. [...]

Yet when the girl returned home, when she arrived in the arms of her real Babushka – expecting at last to retell the dreadful vision, to collapse, to cry, to blubberingly divulge – it was not cinematic disintegration she described. She did not tell of the deranged and incoherent bodies of the players, nor of how these recalled to her a personal haunting. Instead she dwelled, in concentration, on single detail: there had been a cone of bright light, a white passageway of floating motes, delicate, enchanting, apparently transcendental, which might, after all, have somehow mystically signified the transit of angels.

Gail Jones, *Dreams of Speaking* (2006)

The difficulty with celebrating modernity [...] is that we live with so many persistently unmodern things. Dreams, love babies, illness. Memory. Death. And all the natural things. Leaves, birds, ocean, animals. [...] And sky. Think of sky. There is nothing modern about the sky.

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